

MORTALITY AND MERCY IN VIENNA

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Just as Siegel got to the address Rachel had given him it started to rain again. All day rain clouds had hung low and ragged-edged over Washington, ruining the view from the top of the Monument for the high-school kids on their senior trips, sending brief squalls which drove tourists squealing and cursing in to find shelter, dulling the delicate pink of the cherry blossoms which had just come out. The address was a small apartment building on a quiet street near Dupont Circle, and Siegel dove into the lobby, in out of the rain, clutching the fifth of scotch he was carrying as if it were a state secret. There had been times--during the past year, in the Avenue Kleber or the Viale delle Terme di Caracalla--where there had been a brief case where the fifth was now, clutched under the same tweed-clad arm against rain or a deadline or some bureaucratic necessity. And most of these times, especially if he were hung over from the night before, or if a girl fellow junior diplomats had sworn was a sure thing had turned out to be so much more than sure that in the end it had not been worth even the price of drinks, he would shake his head like a drunk who is trying to stop seeing double, having become suddenly conscious of the weight of the briefcase and the insignificance of its contents and the stupidity of what he was doing out here, away from Rachel, following an obscure but clearly-marked path through a jungle of distraintments and affidavits and depositions; wondering why, in his first days with the Commission, he should have ever regarded himself as any kind of healer when he had always known that for a healer--a prophet actually, because if you cared about it at all you had to be both--there is no question of balance sheets or legal complexity, and the minute you become involved with anything like that you are something less; a doctor, or a fortune-teller. When he was thirteen, a little less than a month after his bar mitzvah, his cousin Miriam had died of cancer and perhaps it was then--sitting shivah on an orange crate in a darkened room high over the Grand Concourse, gaunt and looking a little like a John Buchan hero even at thirteen, gazing fixedly at the symbolic razor slash halfway up his black necktie that this awareness had begun to grow, because he still remembered Miriam's husband cursing Zeit the doctor, and the money wasted on the operations, and the whole AMA, crying unashamed in this dim hot room with the drawn shades; and it had so disquieted young Siegel that when his brother Mike had gone away to Yale to take pre-med he had been afraid that something would go wrong and that Mike whom he loved would turn out to be only a doctor, like Zeit, and be cursed someday too by a distraught husband in rent garments, in a twilight bedroom. He would stand, therefore, out in some street, not moving, hanging on to the briefcase and thinking about Rachel who was 4' 10" in her stocking feet, whose neck was pale and sleek, a Modigliani neck, whose eyes were not mirror images but both slanted the same way, dark brown almost to fathomlessness, and after awhile he would drift up to the surface again and be annoyed with himself for worrying about these things when the data inside the briefcase should have been at the office fifteen minutes ago; and realize, reluctantly, that the racing against time, the awareness of being a cog, the elan--almost roguery of the playboy element in the Commission which went well with his British staff officer appearance--even the intradepartmental scheming and counterscheming which went on in jazz cellars at two in

the morning, in pensions over brandy and soda, were, after all, exciting. It was only when he forgot to take vitamin B pills the night before to ward off a hangover that these funky periods would come at all. Most of the time the brighteyed and busy tailed Siegel would assert himself and then he would look on the funky days as only brief aberrations. Because when you came down to it it was fun to manoeuvre. In the army he had lived by a golden rule of Screw the Sergeant before He Screweth Thee; later in college he had forged meal tickets, instigated protest riots and panty raids, manipulated campus opinion through the school newspaper; and this was the part of him inherited from a mother who at the age of 19 had struggled with her soul one night in a railroad flat somewhere in Hell's Kitchen and, half-drunk on bootleg beer, had ended up refuting Aquinas and quitting the Roman church; who would grin fondly at her husband and refer to him as an innocent slob who never had a chance against her female cunning, and advise Seigel never to marry a schickseh but to find himself some nice quiet Jewish girl because at least there you were given a running start. For this his roommate at college sophomore year had called him Stephen and taunted him mercilessly about the still small Jesuit voice which kept him from being either kicked around or conscious of guilt or simply ineffective like so many of the other Jewish boys on campus seemed to Grossmann to be. "Also, Grossmann," Siegel had retorted, "it perhaps saves me from being a schmuck like you." Grossmann would laugh and stick his nose back in a textbook. "It is the seed of your destruction," he would murmur. "House divided against itself? You know." Well, here he was, 30 and on the way to becoming a career man, and not particularly aware of destruction mainly because he was unable to give it a name or a face, unless they were Rachel's and this he doubted. With the bottle under his arm he climbed up two flights of stairs, the few raindrops which had caught him glistening in the shaggy tangle of his tweed coat. He hoped she had said sevenish--he was pretty sure but it would be awkward if he arrived too early. He rang the buzzer in front of a door that said 3F and waited. It seemed to be quiet inside and he was just beginning to wonder if maybe she hadn't said eightish when the door opened and a wild-looking, rangy man with fierce eyebrows, wearing a tweed coat and carrying what looked like a pig foetus under one arm, stood staring at him, an empty room behind him, and Siegel, annoyed, realized he had goofed and that 30 years was a long time and that this might be a first indication of senility. They faced each other like slightly flawed mirror images--different patterns of tweed, scotch bottle and pig foetus but no discrepancy in height --with Siegel experiencing a mixed feeling of discomfort and awe, and the word Doppelganger had just floated into his mind when the other's eyebrows shot up into twin parabolas and he stuck out his free hand and said, "You're early but come in. I'm David Lupescu."

Siegel shook hands, muttering his own name and the spell broke; he looked at the object under Lupescu's arm and saw that it really was a pig foetus, caught the faint scent of formaldehyde and scratched his head. "I brought some booze" he said. "I'm sorry about this, I'd thought Rachel said seven." Lupescu smiled vaguely and closed the door behind him. "Don't worry about it," he said, "I've got to put this thing someplace." He motioned Siegel to a seat and picked up an old-fashioned glass from a table, a chair from nearby, dragged the chair to the entrance of what Siegel presumed was the kitchen, stood on the chair, took a thumbtack from his pocket, stuck it through the umbilical cord of the pig foetus and tacked it onto the molding over the entrance, hammering with the bottom of the glass. He jumped down off the chair and above him the foetus swung dangerously. He looked up at it. "I hope it stays there," he said,

and then turned to face Siegel. "Fetching, isn't it?" Siegel shrugged. "Dada exhibit in Paris on Christmas eve, 1919," Lupescu said, "used one in place of mistletoe. But ten to one this group won't even notice it. You know Paul Brennan? He won't."

"I don't know anybody," Siegel said, "I've been sort of out of touch. I just got back from overseas last week. All the old crowd seems to have drifted away."

Lupescu stuck his hands in his pockets and looked around the room. brooding. "I know," he said grimly. "Big turnover. But the types are constant." He moved toward the kitchen, glanced in, paced back again to the French windows, then suddenly turned and shot out a forefinger at Siegel. "You," he almost roared. "Of course. You're perfect." He advanced toward Siegel menacingly, stood looming over him. "Good grief," Siegel said, cowering a little. "Mon semblable," Lupescu said, "mon frere." He gazed at Siegel. "A sign," he said, "a sign, and deliverance." Siegel could smell alcohol fumes on Lupescu's breath. "I beg your pardon," Siegel said. Lupescu began pacing around the room.

"Only a matter of time," he said. "Tonight. Of course. Why. Why not. Pig foetus. Symbol. God, what a symbol. And now. Freedom- Deliverance," he screamed. "Genie. Bottle. Century after century, until Siegel, fisher of souls, pulls the cork." He began running around the room. "Raincoat," he said, picking a raincoat up off the sofa, "shaving gear." He disappeared into the kitchen for a moment, came out with an overnight kit in his hands wearing the raincoat. He paused at the door. "It's all yours," he said. "You are now the host. As host you are a trinity: (a) receiver of guests--" ticking them off on his fingers--"(b) an enemy and (c) an outward manifestation, for them, of the divine body and blood."

"Wait a minute," Siegel said, "where the hell are you going?"

"The outside," Lupescu said, "out of the jungle."

"But look, hey, I can't make this. I don't know any of these people."

"All part of it," Lupescu said airily. "You'll pick it up fast enough," and was through the door and out before Siegel could think of an answer. Ten seconds later the door opened again and Lupescu stuck his head in and winked. "Mistah Kurtz--he dead," he announced owlishly and disappeared. Siegel sat staring at the foetus. "Well now, what the hell," he said slowly. He stood up and strolled across the room to where the phone was and dialed Rachel's number. When she answered he said, "Fine friends you have."

"Where are you?" she said. "I just got back." Siegel explained. "Well I'm glad you called," Rachel said. "I called your place and you weren't in. I wanted to tell you, Sally's brother-in-law's sister, a winsome little brat of fourteen, just blew into town from some girls' school in Virginia and Sally is out with Jeff so I've got to stay here and entertain her till Sally gets back, and by the time I'm able to get away the liquor will be all gone: I know Lupescu's parties."

"Oh for god's sake," Siegel said irritably, "this is ridiculous. If Lupescu's friends are anything like him this place is about to be invaded by a horde of raving lunatics, none of whom I know. And now you're not even coming."

"Oh it's a nice crowd," she said. "A little curious maybe but I think you'll like them. You ought to stay." The door was suddenly and violently kicked open and through it lurched a fat florid adolescent in a sailor suit, carrying a girl piggy-back. "Lewpayskew," the sailor shouted. "Whay aw yew, yew mothuh-lovin Roumanian."

"Hold on," Siegel said. "What was that again," he asked the sailor, who had deposited his passenger on the floor. "Mayun ah said whay's Lewpayskew," the sailor said. "God," he

babbled into the phone, “they’re coming, they’re filtering in already. What do I do, Rachel, they can’t even talk English. There is some nautical looking type here who is speaking no language known to man.”

“Darling,” Rachel laughed, “stop acting like a war flick. That’s probably only Harvey Duckworth, who comes from Alabama and has a charming southern accent. You’ll get along wonderfully, I know you will. Call me tomorrow and let me know everything that has happened.”

“Wait,” Siegel said desperately, but she had already said “Bye-bye,” and hung up. He stood there holding the dead receiver. Harvey Duckworth was stomping around in the other rooms, yelling for Lupescu; and the girl, who was very young and had long black hair and big hoop earrings and was wearing a sweatshirt and levis -- who seemed to Siegel a perfect parody of the girl bohemian of the ‘40’s--stood up and looked at Siegel. “I want to go to bed with you,” she intoned dramatically and all at once Siegel cheered up. He put the receiver back on the hook and smiled. “I’m sorry,” he said suavely, “but statutory rape and all that, you know. Can I get you a drink?”

He went into the kitchen without waiting for an answer and found Duckworth sitting on the sink trying to open a wine bottle. The cork popped out suddenly and the bottle slipped and Chianti splashed all over Duckworth’s whites. “Gaw damn,” Duckworth said, staring at the purple stain. “Mizzable Guineas can’t even make wahn bottles raht.” The buzzer rang and Siegel called, “Get that would you, beautiful,” and picked the Chianti bottle up off the floor. “Still some more.” he said cheerfully. He was beginning to feel jovial, irresponsibly so; a lightheadedness which he realized might be one of the first stages of hysteria but which he rather hoped was some vestige of the old nonchalance which had sustained him on the Continent for the past two years. In the other room he heard what sounded like a chorus of roaring boys, chanting dirty limericks. The girl came in and said, “My god, it’s Brennan and his friends.”

“Oh goodo,” Siegel said. “They seem to be in fine voice.” Indeed, they were. In his suddenly amiable state it seemed to Siegel that this account of the young fellow named Cheever who had an affair with a beaver took on Deeper Human Significance, was gilded with a certain transcendental light which reminded him of that final trio from Faust, where the golden stairs come down and Margarethe ascends to heaven. “Really lovely,” he mused. The girl looked with disgust at Duckworth and then smiled brightly at Siegel. “By the way,” she said, “I’m Lucy.”

“Hi,” Siegel said. “My name is Cleanth but my friends call me Siegel, out of pity.”

“Where’s David anyway. I ought to give him hell for inviting that oaf Brennan.”

Siegel pursed his lips. Hell, this was impossible. He had to trust somebody. He took her hand and led her into the bedroom and sat her down on a bed. “No,” he said quickly. “Not what you’re thinking.” He told her about Lupescu’s sudden departure and she shrugged and said, “Maybe it was a good thing. He would have cracked sooner or later, he was going native.” “

That’s a strange way to put it,” Siegel said. After all, going native in Washington, D.C.? In more exotic places, certainly, he had seen that. He remembered a Peter Arno cartoon in the New Yorker he had always liked, showing a girl in Apache costume, sitting on the lap of a depraved-looking Frenchman in a sidewalk cafe; and the girl’s friend, obviously an American tourist, armed with camera, shoulder-bag and guidebook, saying, with a scandalized

expression, "But Mary Lou, you mean you're not going back to Bryn Mawr, ever?" Still, stranger things had happened. In the two semesters he spent at Harvard Siegel had witnessed the gradual degeneration of his roommate Grossmann, a proud and stubborn native of Chicago who denied the presence of any civilization outside of Cook County and for whom Boston was worse even than Oak Park, was in fact, a sort of apotheosis of the effete and the puritan. Grossmann had remained unmarred, majestically sneering, happy-go-lucky, until one Christmas eve he and Siegel and some friends and a group of Radcliffe girls had gone carolling on Beacon hill.

Whether it was the booze they had brought along or the fact that Grossmann had just finished reading not only Santayana's *The Last Puritan* but also a considerable amount of T. S. Eliot--and so might have been a little more susceptible to tradition in general and to Christmas eve on Beacon hill in particular --or merely the bothersome tendency Grossman had to get sentimental in the company of Radcliffe girls, he had still been touched enough to inform Siegel later on that night that maybe there were a few human beings in Boston after all. And this had been the first tiny rent in that Midwestern hauteur which he had carried up to now as a torero carries his cape; after that night it was all downhill. Grossmann took to strolling in the moonlight with only the most patrician of Radcliffe and Wellesley girls; he discovered a wonderful make-out spot down behind the minute man statue in Concord; he began carrying a black umbrella and gave away all his loud clothes, substituting flawless and expensive tweeds and worsteds. Siegel was mildly disturbed at all this but it was not until one afternoon in the early spring, when he entered their rooms at Dunster and surprised Grossmann standing in front of the mirror, umbrella under one arm, eyebrows raised superciliously and nose ached loftily, reciting "I parked my car in Harvard yard," over and over, that he was struck with the extent of his roommate's dissipation.

The strong nasal r's Siegel had secretly admired there now eneverated and pallid; and in that classic shibboleth, Siegel recognized poor, innocent Grossmann's swan song. A year later Siegel got a letter, the last: Grossmann had married a Wellesley girl and they were living in Swampscott. *Sit tibi terra levis*, Grossmann. But Siegel wondered how in the hell it was possible for anyone to sink roots in a town at once as middle class and as cosmopolitan as Washington. You could become bourgeois or one of the international set but this could happen in any city. Unless it had nothing to do with the place at all and was a question of compulsion--unless there was something which linked people like Gaugin and Eliot and Grossmann, some reason which gave them no other choice; and this was why, when it had happened in Boston and now maybe even in Washington, for god's sake, Siegel felt uneasy and unwilling to think about it too much.

This little Jesuit thing, this poltergeist, would start kicking around inside his head just as it had done with the briefcase, and call him back to the real country where there were drinks to be mixed and bon mots to be tossed out carelessly and maybe a drunk or two to take care of. It was doing that now. So all he did was look at Lucy quizzically and say, "Well I don't know. He seemed sort of under the weather. Also maybe a little neurotic."

The girl laughed softly, not trying for rapport any more, not even the bedroom kind; but anxious now for thoughts of her own which Siegel was neither ready to be curious about nor confident he would be able to cope with. "A little neurotic," she said, "is like being a little bit pregnant. You don't know David. He's well, Siegel, he's the only one of us who is." Siegel

smiled. "I shouldn't talk," he said, "I'm a stranger. Look Lucy, would you help me out a little with this group?"

"Me help you?" Suddenly weak, she answered with something that was so curiously both impotence and scorn that he began to wonder how well she was herself. "All right, I'll make a deal. Mutual aid. The truth is I need a shoulder to cry on." Siegel threw a quick glance behind him out into the kitchen, a glance which she caught. "Don't worry about them," she smiled, "they'll take care of themselves for awhile. They know where the liquor is and everything." Siegel smiled in apology, pushed the door shut and settled back on the bed next to her, resting on one elbow.

A Klee original was on the wall facing them; two crossed BAR's, hunting rifles and a few sabres hung around the other walls. The room was sparsely furnished in Swedish modern and carpeted wall to wall. He looked down at her and said, "OK, cry away."

"I don't really know why I should be telling you about this," she began and it was as if she had said. "Bless me father for I have sinned," because Siegel often thought that if all the punks, luses, coeds in love, woebegone PFC's--the whole host of trodden-on and disaffected--who had approached him with that opening formula were placed end to end they would surely reach from here back to the Grand Concourse and a timid spindleshanked boy in a slashed necktie "Except," she continued, "that you look like David, you have the same kind of sympathy for anybody who gets kicked around, I feel that somehow." Siegel shrugged. "Anyway," she said, "it's Brennan. Brennan and that bitch Considine."

And she went on to tell how apparently this female economics expert named Debby Considine had returned a week ago from an expedition to Ontario and right away Paul Brennan had started chasing her again. There was a tree outside her apartment house on P St. and Brennan had climbed up this tree and waited for her to collie out and whenever she did he would proclaim his passion for her in loud and improvised blank verse. Usually a small crowd would collect and finally one night the cops came with ladders and hauled him down and dragged him away.

"And who does he call to come down to the precinct to bail him out," Lucy said. "Me, is who. Right before payday too. The bastard still hasn't paid me back. And to make matters worse he already had a record. Krinkles Porcino, that's Paul's roommate, got engaged to this girl Monica back around February. The two kids were really in love, and Paul was fond of both of them, so that when Sybil--she was living with David at the time--started running after Krinkles and threatening to break the thing up--well anyway she finally threw this big bitch scene with Paul in the lobby of the Mayflower and Paul ended up slugging her with a vodka bottle he happened to be carrying, and they got him for assault. And of course David had a bad time of it because he hates to get involved in anything, but Sam Fleischmann, who's hated Paul's guts ever since Paul sold him \$100 worth of phony uranium stock, felt so sorry for David that he started writing poison pen letters to Sybil, dumping all over Paul. He'd write them in the morning right after we got up, while I made breakfast, and we'd both laugh and laugh because it was so much fun."

"Oh," Siegel said, "ha, ha."

"And then when Paul got out," she went on, "what should happen but Harvey had to fly into a rage at Paul because he knew I was in love with Paul and was sending him cigarettes and cookies and things while he was in stir, and he chased Paul for seven blocks through the theatre

district one night with a boatswain's knife. That was sort of funny too because Harvey was in uniform and it took four SP's finally to bring him down, and even then he broke the arm of one of them and sent another to Bethesda Naval Hospital with severe abdominal wounds. So Paul is out on bail now and threatening to get Monica because she's living with Sam but what the hell else can she do when Krinkles has been out of town for weeks trying to kick the habit and all. The trouble is that damn junkie doesn't know how really good she is, Siegel. She pawned Krinkles' baritone sax only a couple of days ago because poor Sam had just lost his job at the Smithsonian and was actually starving before she found out about it and took him in. The girl's a saint."

She went on in the same way for fifteen minutes more, laying bare, like a clumsy brain surgeon, synapses and convolutions which should never have been exposed, revealing for Siegel the anatomy of a disease more serious than he had suspected: the badlands of the heart, in which shadows, and crisscrossed threads of inaccurate self-analysis and Freudian fallacy, and passages where the light and perspective were tricky, all threw you into that heightened hysterical edginess of the sort of nightmare it is possible to have where your eyes are open and everything in the scene is familiar, yet where, flickering behind the edge of the closet door, hidden under the chair in the corner, is this *je ne sais quoi de sinistre* which sends you shouting into wakefulness.

Until finally one of Brennan's friends, whom Lucy introduced as Vincent, wandered in and informed them that somebody had already walked through the French windows without opening them; and Siegel realized wearily that it was going to be that kind of a party, and having committed himself anyway by the very act of lying next to a girl he did not know and playing the role of crying towel for half an hour, resolved in true British staff officer style to bite the jolly old bullet and make the best of a bad job.

In the kitchen were a couple seated on the sink making out; Duckworth, horribly drunk, lying on the floor and hurling pistachio nuts at the pig foetus; and a group of four or five people in Bermuda shorts sitting in a circle playing Prince. In the other room somebody had put on a cha cha record and a few couples were improvising freely. Presumably intelligent talk flickered around the room with the false brightness of heat lightning: in the space of a minute Siegel caught the words "Zen," "San Francisco," and "Wittgenstein," and felt a mild sense of disappointment, almost as if he had expected some esoteric language, something out of Albertus Magnus. Beside the pig foetus there was only one other really incongruous note in the whole scene: a swarthy looking person in torn khakis and an old corduroy coat who stood in one corner like some memento mori, withdrawn and melancholy. "That's Considine's latest," Lucy said, "an Indian she brought back from Ontario. Boy, what a hunk."

"He looks sad," Siegel said. Somebody handed Siegel an ambiguous mixture in an old-fashioned glass and he sipped it automatically, grimaced and set it down. "His name is Irving Loon," she said dreamily.

"Irving what?" said Siegel.

"Loon. He's Ojibwa. Oh there's Paul. Talking to Considine the bastard." She led him over to a corner where a diminutive junior executive type was eagerly haranguing this serpentine brunette with heavily mascaraed eyes. At his first glimpse of Debby Considine Siegel drew in a low whistle and let the four fingers of his left hand wobble to and for a few times, forgetting about Irving Loon, Prince players and drunken sailors. "Marrone," he whispered.

Lucy glared at him. "Not you too," she said furiously. "Goddamn all these sex machines." He was introduced and after awhile Lucy managed to haul Brennan away on some pretext or other and Siegel was left alone with the lady economist.

"And how were the boondocks of Ontario," he said. She looked at him from under lowered lashes. "So fascinating," she murmured in a husky, detached voice. "Do you know the Ojibwa?" Siegel began flipping over a stack of mental IBM cards frantically. There was something he knew, something he had had in college. It irritated him not to be able to call the information up because most of the courses he had taken had served no other function--at least such had been his undergraduate protests--than to provide material for conversation at parties like this one. Ojibwa Indians. Somewhere in Ontario. Something weird, even funny, but he was damned if he could pin it down.

"You look compassionate," Debby said suddenly. "Is there somewhere we can talk?" and Siegel, pulled away from the IBM cards, thought Jesus Christ, here we go again. He led her into the bedroom, which was beginning to look like some perversely-decorated confessional, and wondered whether this had been David Lupescu's place for listening to bent souls. He had a hunch it was. She stood close to him and played with his Challis tie and gave him the demure bit with the eyelashes again. "You're the same," she whispered, "you have this monumental Lupescu coolness. You're sure you're not his doubleganger."

"No," Siegel said, "I'm not sure. Go ahead." She hesitated and he prompted her: "Bless me father..."

The eyelids flew open. "David said that too. Who are you, Siegel?"

"For the moment a father confessor. What seems to be your trouble, my child."

"It's Irving Loon," she said, sitting on the bed and playing with the empty highball glass she had brought in with her, ignoring the irony, "he was so happy back in Ontario. At ricing time, you see, all the families are together, everyone happy, Togetherness in Ojibwa land. Blasts, brawls, sex orgies, community sings, puberty rituals. All kinds of wonderful local color to fill up notebook after notebook with. And Irving Loon, ten feet tall with fists like rocks and enough to make even a jaded heart like mine uneasy." Then, surprisingly-- and, for Siegel, embarrassingly--she began reeling off a list of the affairs she had had in all the underdeveloped areas she had visited for the State Dept.; several pages of unofficial statistics which sounded a little like the Catalogue aria from Don Giovanni.

It seemed she had this habit of picking up male specimens wherever she went and bringing them back with her and dropping them after a few weeks. Her exes either assimilated in with The Group or found a niche in some other group or dropped out of sight completely and forever. But Irving Loon, she insisted, was different. He had this brooding James Dean quality about him.

"He's been standing in the same corner all evening," she said. "He hasn't spoken a word for two days. I feel--" and her eyes gazed over Siegel's shoulder, out into god knows where "that it's not only nostalgia for the wilderness, but almost as if somehow out there, in the hinterlands, with nothing but snow and forests and a few beaver and moose, he has come close to something which city dwellers never find all their lives, may never even be aware exists, and it's this that he misses, that the city kills or hides from him." I'll be damned, thought Siegel. This broad is serious. "And this is just what I can't tell Paul," she sighed. "He makes fun of Irving, calls him ignorant. But it's a divine melancholia and it's what I love about him."

Good grief, that was it.

Melancholia. Just by accident she had used that word, the psychologist's term, instead of "melancholy." Little Professor Mitchell, perched like a sparrow on his desk in anthropology lecture, hands in his coat pockets, a permanently sarcastic smile twisting one side of his mouth, talking about psychopathy among the Ojibwa Indians. Of course. The old memory bank was still functioning after all. "You must remember that this group lives forever at the brink of starvation," Mitchell said in that deprecating, apologetic tone which implied that for him all cultures were equally mad; it was only the form that differed, never the content. "It has been said that the Ojibwa ethos is saturated with anxiety," and simultaneously 50 pens copied the sentence verbatim.

"The Ojibwa are trained, from childhood, to starve; the male child's entire upbringing is dedicated to a single goal: that of becoming a great hunter. Emphasis is on isolation, self-sufficiency. There is no sentimentality among the Ojibwa. It is an austere and bleak existence they lead, always one step away from death. Before he can attain to the state of manhood a boy must experience a vision, after starving himself for several days. Often after seeing this vision he feels he has acquired a supernatural companion, and there is a tendency to identify. Out in the wilderness, with nothing but a handful of beaver, deer, moose and bear between him and starvation, for the Ojibwa hunter, feeling as he does at bay, feeling a concentration of obscure cosmic forces against him and him alone, cynical terrorists, savage and amoral deities---" this time a smile in self-reproach--"which are bent on his destruction, the identification may become complete. When such paranoid tendencies are further intensified by the highly competitive life of the summer villages at ricing and berry-picking time, or by the curse, perhaps, of a shaman with some personal grudge, the Ojibwa becomes highly susceptible to the well-known Windigo psychosis."

Siegel knew about the Windigo, all right. He remembered being scared out of his wits once at camp by the fireside yarn image of a mile-high skeleton made of ice, roaring and crashing through the Canadian wilderness, grabbing up humans by the handful and feeding on their flesh. But he had outgrown the nightmares of boyhood enough to chuckle at the professor's description of a half-famished hunter, already slightly warped, identifying with the Windigo and turning into a frenzied cannibal himself, foraging around the boondocks for more food after he had gorged himself on the bodies of his immediate family. "Get the picture," he had told Grossmann that night, over mugs of Wurtzburger. "Altered perception. Simultaneously, all over god knows how many square miles, hundreds, thousands of these Indians are looking at each other out of the corner of their eye and not seeing wives or husbands or little children at all. What they see is big fat juicy beavers. And these Indians are hungry, Grossmann. I mean, my gawd. A big mass psychosis. As far as the eye can reach--" he gestured dramatically-- "Beavers. Succulent, juicy, fat."

"How yummy," Grossmann had commented wryly. Sure, it was amusing, in a twisted sort of way. And it gave anthropologists something to write about and people at parties something to talk about. Fascinating, this Windigo psychosis. And oddly enough its first stages were marked by a profound melancholia. That was what had made him remember, a juxtaposition of words, an accident. He wondered why Irving Loon had not been talking for two days. He wondered if Debby Considine knew about this area of the Ojibwa personality.

“And Paul just won’t understand,” she was saying. “Of course it was a bitchy thing to complain to the police but I’d lie awake nights, thinking of him crouched up in that tree, like some evil spirit, waiting for me. I suppose I’ve always been a little afraid of something like that, something unfamiliar, something I couldn’t manipulate. Oh yes,” she admitted to his raised eyebrows, “I’ve manipulated them all right. I didn’t want to, Siegel, god knows I didn’t. But I can’t help it.” Siegel felt like saying, “Use a little less mascara or something,” but was brought up short by an awareness which had been at the back of his mind since Lupescu had left: a half-developed impression about the role Lupescu had occupied for this group; and it occurred to him that his double would never have said anything like that. You might give absolution or penance, but no practical advice. Tucked snugly in some rectory of the mind, Cleanth Siegel, S.J., looked on with approval. “Changing the subject for a moment,” Siegel said, “do you know, has Irving told you anything about the Windigo?”

“It’s funny you should mention that,” she said, “it’s a nature god or something, that they worship. I’m not on the anthropology end of things or I could tell you more about it. But the last time Irving was talking--he speaks English so well--he said once ‘Windigo, Windigo, stay by me.’ It’s this poetic, religious quality in him that’s so touching.” And right about here Siegel began to feel really uneasy, to hear this tiny exasperating dissonance. Poetic? Religious? Ha, ha.

“I’m afraid,” she was saying. “I get so depressed, so exhausted. Even as a little girl I used to be scared of being hit by a meteorite, isn’t that silly? This terror of the unfamiliar, this sort of arbitrary act of god or something. It got bad, very bad, two years ago and I tried to straighten everything out with an act of Debby Considine, by taking rather more than the prescribed amount of Seconal. Then when it didn’t work I rode up on another crest and I’ve been there for two years and I guess non I’m about due for a trough again.”

Siegel sat up suddenly and glared straight ahead of him, at the crossed BAR’s on the wall. He was getting fed up with this. Lupescu was wrong: you did not pick this sort of thing up quickly at all. It was a slow process and dangerous because in the course of things it was very possible to destroy not only yourself but your flock as well. He took her hand. “Come on,” he said, “I’d like to meet Irving. Say for your penance ten Hail Marys and make a good Act of Contrition.” “Oh my god,” she murmured. “I am heartily sorry . . .” and apparently she was, but probably only because the interview had been cut short. They threaded their way between several inert bodies in the kitchen. The cha cha side had been replaced by Bartok’s Concerto for Orchestra and Siegel smiled grimly because of its appropriateness; because he knew he could listen to anything else but this mad Hungarian without getting bugged, but at the sound of an entire string section run suddenly amok, shrieking like an uprooted mandrakes trying to tear itself apart, the nimble little Machiavel inside him would start to throw things at the mensch who had just cast off adolescence and who still sat perpetual shivall for people like Debby Considine and Lucy and himself and all the other dead, trying to goad it into action; and he wondered if perhaps Lucy’s diagnosis of Lupescu’s trouble hadn’t been correct and if someday he, Siegel, might not find himself standing in front of some mirror with a pig foetus under one arm, reciting Freudian cant at himself to get the proper inflection right.

“Irving Loon,” Debby said, “Cleanth Siegel.” Irving Loon stood motionless, seemingly unaware of their presence. Debby put her hand on the Ojibwa’s arm and caressed it. “Irving,” she said softly, “please say something.” Damn the torpedoes, Siegel thought. Full speed ahead.

“Windigo,” he said quietly and Irving Loon jumped as if an ice cube had been dropped down his neck. He looked intently at Siegel, probing suddenly with black, piercing eyes. Then he shifted his gaze to Debby and smiled wanly. He put his arm around her waist and nuzzled her cheek. “Debby,” he murmured, “my beautiful little beaver.”

“Isn’t that sweet,” Debby said, smiling over her shoulder at Siegel. Oh my god, Siegel thought. Oh no. Beaver? Now wait a minute. Somebody was tugging at Siegel’s coat sleeve and he turned swiftly, nervously, and saw Brennan. “Can I see you alone for a minute,” Brennan said. Siegel hesitated. Irving Loon and Debby were whispering endearments to one another. “Sure, okay,” Siegel said absently. They crunched over the broken glass from the French windows and went out on a small balcony, which was just as well, because Siegel was beginning to get a little sick of the bedroom. The rain had dwindled to a light mist and Siegel pulled his coat collar up. “I hear you’re a pretty sympathetic guy,” Brennan began, “and I guess you know how it is with me and Debby. The truth is I’m worried about that Indian.”

“So am I,” Siegel started to say and then caught himself. This theory about why Irving Loon was not talking was based only on suspicion; and this whole absurd, surrealist atmosphere had after all been working on an imagination known occasionally to go off the deep end. So instead he said, “I could see where you might.” Brennan turned crafty. “I think he’s using hypnosis on her,” he confided, darting quick glances back inside to see if anyone was listening. Siegel nodded profoundly.

Brennan went on to explain his side of the tree-climbing episode and by the time he was through Siegel, who had not been paying attention, was surprised to find, on looking at his watch for the first time that evening, that it was almost eleven. A few people had left and the party was showing the first signs of slowing down. Siegel wandered out into the kitchen where he found half a fifth of scotch, and made a scotch on the rocks; his first drink, as a matter of fact, since he had arrived. He stood in the kitchen, alone, trying to assess things. First stage, melancholia. Second stage, direct violence. How much had Irving Loon been drinking? How much did starvation have to do with the psychosis once it got under way? And then the enormity of it hit him. Because if this hunch were true, Siegel had the power to work for these parishioners a kind of miracle, to bring them a very tangible salvation. A miracle involving a host, true, but like no holy eucharist. He was the only one, besides Irving Loon, who knew. Also, a sober voice reminded him, he was apparently the only one who had the Windigo psychosis as his sole piece of information about the Ojibwa. It might be a case of generalization, there might be any number of things wrong with Irving Loon. Still, perhaps . . . a case of conscience.

Vincent came up to him and wanted to talk but he waved him off. Siegel had had about enough of confessions. He wondered how his predecessor had managed to remain as father confessor for as long as he had. It occurred to him now that Lupescu’s parting comment had been no drunken witticism; but that the man really had, like some Kurtz, been possessed by the heart of a darkness in which no ivory was ever sent out from the interior, but instead hoarded jealously by each of its gatherers to build painfully, fragment by fragment, temples to the glory of some imago or obsession, and decorated inside with the art work of dream and nightmare, and locked finally against a hostile forest, each “agent” in his own ivory tower, having no windows to look out of, turning further and further inward and cherishing a small flame behind the altar. And Kurtz too had been in his way a father confessor. Siegel shook his head, trying to clear it.

Somebody had started a crap game in the other room and Siegel sat down on the kitchen table, swinging one leg, looking in at the crowd. "Oh you're a fine group," he muttered.

He was beginning to think that maybe he should tell all these people to go to hell and go drop in on Rachel after all when he saw Irving Loon come dreamlike in under the pig foetus, eyes staring straight ahead, unseeing. Siegel, paralyzed, watched Irving Loon go into the bedroom, drag a chair over to one wall, stand on it, and unhook one of the BAR's. Rapt, entirely absorbed in what he was doing, the Indian began rummaging around in the drawers of Lupescu's desk. Gingerly Siegel edged himself off the table and tiptoed to the bedroom door. Irving Loon, still singing to himself produced with a smile a box of .30 caliber ammunition. Happily he began putting rounds into the magazine. Siegel counted the rounds as he put them in. The magazine would hold 20. All right, Siegel, he said to himself, here it is. Moment of truth.

Espada broken, muleta lost, horse disembowelled, picadors sick with fear. Five in the afternoon, crowd screaming. Miura bull, sharp horns, charging in. He figured there were about sixty seconds to make a decision, and now the still small Jesuit voice, realizing that the miracle was in his hands after all, for real, vaunted with the same sense of exhilaration Siegel had once felt seeing five hundred hysterical freshmen advancing on the women's dorms, knowing it was he who had set it all in motion. And the other, gentle part of him sang kaddishes for the dead and mourned over the Jesuit's happiness, realizing however that this kind of penance was as good as any other; it was just unfortunate that Irving Loon would be the only one partaking of any body and blood, divine or otherwise. It took no more than five seconds for the two sides to agree that there was really only one course to take.

Quietly Siegel strolled back through the kitchen, through the living room, taking his time, unnoticed by the crap shooters, opened the door, stepped out into the hall and closed the door behind him. He walked downstairs, whistling. At the first floor landing, he heard the first screams, the pounding of footsteps, the smashing of glass. He shrugged. What the hell, stranger things had happened in Washington. It was not until he had reached the street that he heard the first burst of the BAR fire.